NEW BOOKS.

A Tale of the Wonderful Sahara.

No doubt the reader will be curious to know what the matter was with Androvsky, the large, lean, self-conscious hero of Robert Hichens's story of "The Garden of Allah" (Frederick A. Stokes Company). Why was he rude to the heroine, a very pretty English lady, in the railroad train on the way to the Sahara Desert? Why was he again rude to her on the tower of Count Anteoni's unoccupied hotel at Beni-Mora—a tower commanding a desert prospect so rich in gorgeous and profound impressions that it takes crowded pages to tell about them?

The heroine herself was tremendously curious about Androvsky. To be sure there were others to interest her. There was the Count Anteoni, hailing from Rome and Sicily, who lived in a wonderful garden of trees and sand. Attendants, displaying naked and perfect feet, went about the Count's garden with cigarettes and roses in their hands. There was one who never went about, but who sat all day playing love songs on a flute. As we read about him we were glad to be out of hearing. The Count also had a purple china dog that sat "with his tail curled over his back sternly staring into vacancy." We felt that our own modest desires would hardly include the china dog.

Then there was the spectral Arab, who looked into the seeds of time by scrutinizing a bag of sand. If Col. Tody Hamilton or Col. George Starr had ever set eyes on him he would have left the Sahara and entered into Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show. "He was the thinnest man she had ever seen, and moved and stood almost as if he were boneless. The line of his delicate and arbitrary features was fierce. His face was pitted with smallpox and marked by an old wound, evidently made by a knife, which stretched from his left cheek to his forehead, ending just over his left eyebrow." He might have been a German student if he had been properly rounded out, and except for other reasons. "The expression of his eyes was almost disgustingly intelligent. While they were fixed upon her, Domini felt as if her body were a glass box in which all her thoughts, feelings and desires were ranged for his inspection."

It would be vain to attempt to rehearse here all that the heroine found interesting in Africa. Take merely the impressions that thronged upon her when she first heard the lovestricken Arab's flute—the same music that multitudes of us doubtless would be willing and even eager to forego. We read:

"The distant love song of the flute seemed to Domini the last touch of enchantment, making this indeed a wonderland. She could not move, and held up her hands to stay the feet of Smain [who had a rose in his hand and was leading her about the Count's garden], who was quite content to wait. Never before had she heard any music that seemed to mean and suggest so much to her as this African tune played by an enamored gardener. Queer and uncouth as it was, distorted with ornaments and tricked out with abrupt runs, exquisitely unnecessary grace notes, and sudden twitterings prolonged till a strange and frivolous Eternity tripped in to banish Time, it grasped Domini's fancy and laid a spell upon her imagination. For it sounded as naively sincere as the song of a bird, and as if the heart from which it flowed were like the heart of a child, a place of revelation, not of concealment. The sun made men careless here. They opened their windows to it, and one could see into the warm and glowing rooms. Domini looked at the gentle Arab youth beside her, already twice married and twice divorced. She listened to Larbi's unending song of love. And she said to herself: 'These people, civilized or not, at least live, and I have been dead all my life, dead in life.' That was horribly possible. She knew it as she felt the enormously powerful spell of Africa descending upon her, enveloping her quietly but irresistibly. The dream of this garden was quick with a vague and yet fierce stirring of realities. There was a murmuring of many small and distant voices, like the voices of innumerable tiny things following restless activities in a deep forest. As she stood there the last grain of European dust was lifted from Domini's soul. How deeply it had been buried, and for how many years."

Domini was 32 years old. As she was rich and good looking, we must think it her own fault that she was not married in England. Of course, the story reader will be thankful to the author for bringing her to Africa to receive impressions. She received plenty of them. Africa is set before us as the land of rest, but Domini was not very restful there. She tried to get to sleep by reading Newman. It rained. She got up and looked out of the window.

"Heavy rain was falling. The night was very black and smelt rich and damp, as if it held in its arms strange offerings—a merchandise altogether foreign, tropical and alluring. As she stood there, face to face with a wonder that she could not see, Domini forgot Newman. She felt the brave companionship of mystery. In it she divined the beating pulses, the hot, surging blood of freedom."

It is curious how we look for freedom in a world in which we are very much constrained. It has never seemed to us that we should better our unquestionably fettered condition by going to the Desert of Sahara. Domini had her own ideas and hopes. We read:

"She wanted freedom, a wide horizon, the great winds, the great sun, the terrible spaces, the glowing, shimmering radiance, the hot, entrancing noons and bloomy, purple nights of Africa. She wanted the nomad's fires and the acid voices of the Kabyle dogs. She wanted the roar of the tom-toms, the clash of the cymbals, the rattle of the negroes' castanets, the fluttering, painted figures of the dancers. She wanted—more than she could express more than she knew. It was there, want, aching in her heart, as she drew into her nostrils this strange and wealthy atmosphere."

"Noon" in the story is more than once printed "moon," but that slight difficulty does not much disturb us. We are willing to believe that the Sahara moon is hot as midday, if the printers insist upon it and if the editors are agreeable. That there are cool winds in Africa we learn a little further along. The heroine was journeying into the desert in a railroad train. The story says:

"The wind was really cold and blowing gustily. She drank it in as if she were tasting a new wine, and she was conscious at once that she had never before breathed such air. There was a wonderful, a startling flavor in it, the flavor of gigantic spaces and of rolling leagues of emptiness. Neither among mountains nor upon the sea had she ever found an atmosphere so fiercely pure, clean and lively with unutterable freedom. She leaned out to it, shutting her eyes. And now that she saw nothing her palate savored it more intensely. The thought of her father [domestic sorrows had detached him from the habit of religious observance] fled from her. All detailed thoughts, all the minutiæ of the mind were swept away. She was bracing herself to an encounter with something gigantic, something unshackled, the being from whose lips this wonderful breath flowed."

It is possible that the reader will stop to inquire of himself what he thinks of this wind. We dare say that in thoughtful moments he has looked for a weathercock to instruct or confirm him as to the quarter from which the wind blew. Perhaps he has detected in the wind in the course of his experience the flavor of rolling leagues of emptiness. If there was sand in the wind he may have had sharp impressions. Our heroine was alive to the qualities of this wind. The story says: "When two lovers kiss their breath mingles, and if they really love, each is conscious that in the breath of the loved one is the loved one's soul coming forth from the temple of the body through the temple door. As Domini leaned out seeing nothing she was conscious that in this breath she drank there was a soul, and it seemed to her that it was the soul which flames in the centre of things and beyond."

For Domini many things were full of luminous and strong impressions. There was Androvsky's hand. They were on the Count's hotel tower together. "The man laid one of his brown hands on the top of the parapet. She looked at it and it seemed to her that she had never before seen the back of a hand express so much of character, look so intense, so ardent and so melancholy as his." There is something about the veins in his hand which we omitted to mark. We are sorry. His voice was also remarkable. "There was an odd muttering sound in his voice, which was deep and probably strong, but which he kept low. Domini thought it was the most male voice she had ever heard. It seemed to be full of sex, like his hands."

There was a novelist once who took note of the wonderful power of expression that is lodged in a human back. Our memory is that the back which was the subject of his particular observation was being flogged. It will be noticed that the hand studied by Domini was merely lying on a parapet; that the most male voice she had ever heard was speaking with much reservation and embarrassment. Hearing Androvsky's voice and remarking his hand, it is natural that she should have regarded him further. We read:

"She glanced at him again. He was a big man, but very thin. Her experienced eyes of an athletic woman told her that he was capable of great and prolonged muscular exertion. He was big boned and deep chested, and had nervous as well as muscular strength."

It does not surprise us to read what is recorded later on. It is chronicled at page 259: "She loved Androvsky. Everything in her loved him; all that she had been, all that she was, all that she could ever be loved him; that which was physical in her, that which was spiritual, the brain, the heart, the soul, body and flame burning within it—all that had made her the wonder that is woman, loved him. She was love for Androvsky."

We approve of this. It will be noticed that it occurs only at page 259. It is at page 267 that we find Androvsky first declaring his love. When he comes to it he does it with commendable ardor. We read:

"Then Androvsky came back quickly till he reached the place where Domini was standing. He put his hands on her shoulders. Then he sank down on the sand, letting his hands slip down over her breast and along her whole body till they clasped themselves around her knees. He pressed his face into her dress against her knees.

"'I love you,' he said, 'I love you—but don't listen to me—you mustn't hear it—you mustn't. But I must say it. I can't—I can't go till I say it. I love you—I love you.'

"She heard him sobbing against her knees, and the sound was as the sound of strength made audible. She put her hands against his temples.

"'I am listening,' she said, 'I must hear it.'

"He looked up, rose to his feet, put his hands behind her shoulders, held her, and set his lips on hers pressing his whole body against hers.

"'Hear it,' he said, muttering against her lips. 'Hear it. I love you—I love you.'

"The two birds they had seen flew back beneath the trees, turned in an airy circle, rose above the trees into the blue sky, and, side by side, winged their way out of the garden to the desert."

The birds were not essential to our gratification. The question remains whether it was proper for a Trappist monk for twenty years incarcerated thus to manifest a natural and perhaps a gross disposition.

The story is full of observations that interest us, as very famous stories have been before. The palm trees had "long, thin stems and drooping, feathery leaves" that were "living and pathetic as the night thoughts of a woman who has suffered, but who turns, with a gesture that will not be denied, to the luminance that dwells at the heart of the world." "The faint cries of the birds dropped down like jewels slipping from the trees." "There is an intensity of feeling that generates action, but there is a greater intensity of feeling that renders action impossible, the feeling that seems to turn a human being into a shell of stone within which burn all the fires of creation." The story itself interests us. We wish to know what will come of the marriage of an escaped Trappist monk with a beautiful and mentally gifted English lady 32 years of age. The pictures of Africa and of the desert "spirit" are interesting, though a little reiterant and overcharged with a poet's visions and emotions. We have read with some difficulty, but not without considerable gratification.

Remarkable Verse by Mr. Heaton.

"Fancies and Thoughts in Verse" is a collection of some two hundred commonplace verses written by Augustus George Heaton and published by the Poet Lore Company. The most remarkable thing about this book is the number of poems presented, the variety of themes handled and the period of time covered in the writing, which includes Lincoln's reelection on the one hand and verses written during the past year on the other. The author has been a student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris; in fact he was the first American student of the school, and we have poems devoted to that phase of life. He has also travelled in Italy like a few other people, and he describes his journey in verse. He is a life member of the Archæological and Numismatic Society of New York, and writes all about that in rhyme that would be difficult for the ordinary reader to grasp only that the author carefully explains the science of coins in a foreword.

Mr. Heaton has also written a series of verses to women, as Browning, Swinburne and all the ordinary poets have done, but unlike them he has prefaced this department with an explanatory introduction which protects him from any entanglements and reads as follows: "'Poems to the Fair Sex' (written in moods of gallantry or great admiration to a number of persons ever honorably known or as sentimental effusions of poetic indulgence at times without individual subject)." The most careful study of the amatory poems under this heading reveals nothing in the slightest degree compromising or calling for the display of a danger signal.

Rabelais Expurgated.

The laudable design of introducing French classics to English readers who know no French has been formed by Prof. Adolphe Cohn and Dr. Curtis Hidden Page of Columbia University. The beginning of the enterprise is the "Rabelais" (G. P. Putnam's Sons), edited by Dr. Page, a handsome, well printed volume now before us. This will be followed by a volume of Montaigne and by two of Molière, and later by one volume each of Beaumarchais and of George Sand. What the lady has to do in such company we do not see, but doubtless the editors have reasons for including her where they leave out Voltaire and Diderot among others.

Dr. Page has had the good taste to select Urquhart's translation with Motteux's continuation for the text. It is perhaps only into Elizabethan English that Rabelais could be rendered, and, at any rate, in those days the translators shirked nothing. Dr. Page uses the knife, and how he does slash! It is true that Rabelais must be made to fit into one volume; it is true that what he wrote cannot be read by boarding school misses, and that possibly Mr. Anthony Comstock might interfere with an accurate publication, but Dr. Page's cuts are so savage that those who know their Rabelais will close the book at once. It may give an indication of something about him to others.

To his excerpts Dr. Page prefixes a very unsatisfactory introduction. The few ascertained facts about Rabelais are there, though, curiously enough, all mention of the Pantagruel is omitted in the biography. It reads like a perfunctory college lecture. There is laudation enough, but no sign of sympathy for his subject. He handles Rabelais with the tongs, a proper enough twentieth century state of mind, but hardly that with which a great genius should be approached. He makes comparisons. Why in the world should he compare Rabelais to Sterne? The two have nothing in common. Dr. Page simply shows that he is as unable to understand Sterne as, we fear, he is incapable of wholly comprehending Rabelais.

For that matter we doubt if any modern literary Anglo-Saxon can do that, and, from their literary output, perhaps few young French writers. Anatole France [illegible] but he belongs to an older time, and the common man in France can. For Rabelais's fun and wit are essentially Gallic; the joyousness, the heartiness of his coarse fun are Latin now. The Elizabethan Englishman understood it, but Puritanism killed it. We find it in Falstaff, at times in Fielding. Swift has the coarseness without the joyousness. But there is no trace of sentimentality in Rabelais, whatever seriousness may underly his satire; and a neurotic generation cannot understand one without nerves.

A Literary Detective Tale.

It is a pleasure to come across a good, fresh disentanglement of mystery. There are painful possibilities in "The Summit House Mystery" by L. Dougall (Funk & Wagnalls Company), but we put them aside in following the intricacies of the plot. The publishers show judgment in discarding the English title of the story, "The Earthly Purgatory," which, though appropriate in a way, would puzzle and disappoint the purchaser. We cannot believe that the story originated in England, for the scene is in the United States and complete familiarity with American conditions is shown.

The reader is led on from what promises to be an idyllic love story imperceptibly into the tangle of a mysterious murder. The probability as to who the murderer is shifts

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Reverses Recorder Goff.

The conviction in General Sessions of Giuseppe Cerami, on a charge of abduction, was reversed yesterday by the Appellate Division. Cerami married a sixteen-year-old Italian girl without the consent of her mother. In a unanimous decision the Appellate Division says that Recorder Goff admitted evidence as to a previous marriage which was inadmissible.